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BISHOP HILL COLONY

Bishop Hill Colony was founded in 1846 by a group of Swedish religious dissenters who believed the Bible was the only true book of God and simplicity was the way to salvation. These beliefs brought them into conflict with the state church of Sweden and led to imprisonment of their leader, Erik Jansson. Pooling their resources in a common treasury, they emigrated to the United States.

The first settlers arrived on the Illinois prairie in early fall of 1846 after walking 160 miles from Chicago. They purchased land and literally “dug in” for the winter. Shelters—half cave and half timber—were built into the side of a ravine running through the town site. Ninety-six died that first winter because of inadequate food and shelter, but with the coming of spring, crops were planted.

Arrival of more immigrants from Sweden expanded the colony and laid the groundwork for remarkable economic gains during the 15 years Bishop Hill existed. Twenty large commercial buildings were erected and 15,000 acres of land were put into farm production. All materials used in the community, except glass and metal, were produced there.

Erik Jansson, who supervised all activities in the colony, was looked upon by his followers as a second Christ. The industrious colonists prospered and permanent buildings were begun in 1848. The religious unity of the colonists was disrupted in 1850 by the murder of Jansson, and the management passed to a seven-member board of trustees.

The colony was incorporated in 1853 to improve efficiency in operating its tremendous business enterprises. Its people excelled in every business endeavor, producing linen, furniture, wagons, brooms and farm products for sale. Between 1848 and 1861, Bishop Hill became a major center of commerce between Rock Island and Peoria.

Eventually, dissension arose over religious and

social doctrine, and, despite economic success, the colony was dissolved by mutual consent in 1861. Property was divided among members.

COLONY CHURCH

Because of the religious nature of the colony, its first permanent building was the church. A housing shortage caused by new arrivals led to construction of a combination apartment-church. The church's basement and first floor each had 10 rooms and 20 families were lodged there—one family to each room. This minimal space was adequate, however, since everyone ate in a communal dining room.

Walls of the first floor rooms were lined with sun dried adobe, a mixture of clay and wheat straw which had excellent insulating and sound-proofing qualities. Each room in the basement and first floor also had a corner fireplace for heating.

Thus, while other western Illinois pioneers were living in log cabins, the founders of Bishop Hill were housed in apartment buildings which, by standards of the 1840's, were modern and comfortable.

The sanctuary on the second floor of the church reflects the "Janssonists" belief in simplicity of worship. White walls are in sharp contrast to the black walnut pews and pulpit panels painted to resemble marble. A center divider separates the men's and women's pews, as was customary in the churches of that period. The church is not Swedish in design, but the wood and wrought iron chandeliers are copies of brass chandeliers the colonists had known in Swedish cathedrals.

The collection of artifacts at Colony Church includes some of the few items the pioneers brought from Sweden, as well as furniture and other articles made or used at Bishop Hill. The furniture, in particular, typifies their fine craftsmanship and its clean, simple style. The church is now owned by the State of Illinois.

OLOF KRANS

The paintings of Olof Krans provide one of the best chronicles of daily life and personalities at Bishop Hill. Krans came to the village in 1850, when he was 12 years old, and remained until its dissolution as a communal enterprise. In 1875, he began painting local scenes as he remembered them. He presented the collection of nearly 100 paintings to the village in 1896, at its 50th anniversary observance.

His primitive style and attention to detail make his works extremely valuable historical documents, a unique record of communal life on the Illinois prairie in the 1850's. Stern faces in the portraits reflect the determination that enabled these people to begin a new life in America.

BJORKLUND HOTEL

By 1850 Bishop Hill had become the overnight stop on the stage route between Peoria and Rock Island. The hotel was owned by the colony but the manager was Sven Bjorklund and his name became associated with the hotel.

The architecture of the hotel fits in well with other colony buildings; however, the interior was much more nicely furnished. The colonists realized even in 1850 that they must give the public what they wanted. After colony dissolution in 1861, the hotel continued to operate until the 1920's when it was used for apartments.

The state purchased the building in 1968 for eventual restoration. It is open to the public.

VILLAGE SQUARE

The village square also is owned and maintained by the state. It contains two monuments—one to the settlers of Bishop Hill, and one to the army company which responded to the Union call for troops at the beginning of the Civil War.

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RESTORATION

Widespread interest in Bishop Hill began as early as 1946, when it became an Illinois State Memorial. It is now both a National and a State Historic Site. The Illinois Department of Conservation is custodian of the semi-restored Colony Church and the semi-restored Bjorklund Hotel.

The re-birth of Bishop Hill began in 1962, when residents joined to form the Bishop Hill Heritage Association, a non-profit corporation for the preservation of their village. The first project was the restoration of the "Steeple Building," a three-story Greek Revival structure, built in 1854 as a hotel or school. The building, topped by a wooden steeple with a one-handed clock, is still under restoration. It contains a museum, period rooms and a crafts store selling local handiwork and Scandinavian imports.



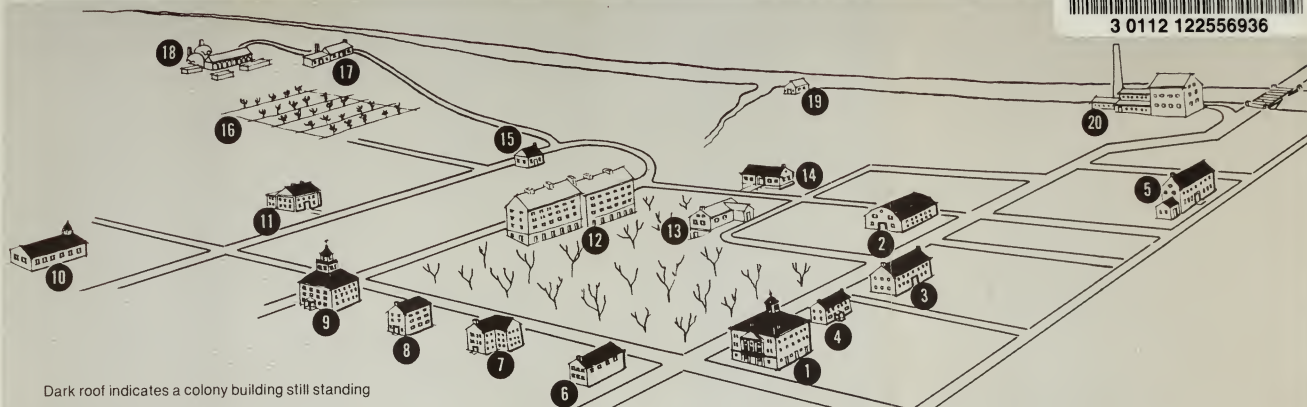
Bjorklund Hotel

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION about this site, contact the Site Superintendent, Bishop Hill, IL 61419, or phone 309/927-3345.

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Dark roof indicates a colony building still standing

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|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Steeple Building | 11. Colony hospital |
| 2. Colony Church (open year round) | 12. Big brick (also site of dug-outs) |
| 3. Blacksmith's Shop | 13. Colony bakery and brewery |
| 4. Carriage and wagon shop | 14. Meat storage building |
| 5. Dairy building | 15. Erik Jansson's home |
| 6. Colony store and post office | 16. Orchard |
| 7. Colony residence | 17. Tannery |
| 8. Colony residence | 18. Brick kilns |
| 9. Bjorklund Hotel (State-Owned) | 19. First mill (water) |
| 10. Colony school | 20. Second mill (steam) |

Paintings by Olof Krans on display in the Bishop Hill Colony Church



Bishop Hill—1846



Bishop Hill—Sowing Grain



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